

**Lake Michigan Fisheries Team
July 18-19, 2002**

Draft Notes

These notes summarize LMFT decisions and recommendations, but are not intended as a summary of all discussions.

Present: Bill Horns, Mike Toney, Pradeep Hirethota, Steve Hogler, Terry Lychwick, Brad Eggold, Al Neibur, John Kubisiak, Lee Meyers, Paul Peeters, Mark Opgenorth, Matt Coffaro, Andy Fayram, Mark Holey (USFWS).

Exotic species for State Fair

Background. Dick Rebeck is looking for live specimens of exotic species for a display at the State Fair.

Action. The LMFT discussed ways to help with this.

Possible rule proposal regarding smelt trawling

Background. The Conservation Congress and the Wisconsin Federation of Great Lakes Sport Fishing Clubs recommended a closure of trawling on Green Bay. The LMFT has considered the issue, but has not recommend a closure. Instead we deferred action and presented the issue for consideration by the Lake Michigan Fisheries Forum. Forum member Mike Collins is attempting to mediate a compromise. Mike Rusch, on behalf of the Federation and NE/GLSF, asked the Forum to defer making any recommendation for 45-60 days. Pete LeClair asked to attend the LMFT meeting to discuss the issue.

Action. No action was taken. A group of commercial fishers (Pete LeClair, Mike LeClair, Bob Ruleau, Greg Ruleau, Steve Ruleau, and Bob Kuntze) joined the LMFT for an hour to present their perspective and discuss the issue.

Lake Michigan Fisheries Forum recommendations regarding Green Bay

Background. A year ago, Darrell Bazzel announced a commitment of \$200,000 to “energize yellow perch restoration and overall fisheries management in Green Bay”. He also asked the Forum to help us with a public consultation effort (i.e., the workshops) and to advise about what small-scale or pilot projects merit implementation. As requested, the Forum provided the Department with a number of recommendations.

Action. The LMFT reviewed the Forum recommendations and will move ahead as follows:

Topic	LMFF recommendation	Action
Yellow Perch	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Review Assessment Methodology:<ol style="list-style-type: none">Update Perch Population ModelEvaluate sampling methods – i.e. lampara seineEvaluate spatial coverageReview existing assessment data,	The LMFT expects to tackle these recommendations using some of the available funds. We are exploring a possible cooperative agreement with USFWS to

	consolidate into electronic format, create focused summaries addressing the hypotheses developed by the proposed Green Bay Research Task Group.	make this possible.
White Perch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow increased commercial harvest of white perch • Evaluate effectiveness of lampara seine to harvest white perch. 	The LMFT established a committee (Tom Hansen and/or Mike Kitt, Justine Hasz, Terry Lychwick, and Lee Meyers) to explore these recommendations and report to the next LMFT meeting.
Predation Diet Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the level of predation on yellow perch by white perch, cormorants, walleye, northern pike, and burbot (in priority order) • Measure the abundance of significant predators and determine their impact on perch. 	The research proposed here is beyond the means of available funding, and should be guided by the recommendations of the proposed Green Bay research group. The LMFT suggested the formation of a steering committee including Mark Holey, Justine Hasz, Mark Maricque, and Bill Willis to develop some more specific ideas about how a Green Bay yellow perch research group would function, for future discussion by the LMFT.
Green Bay Fisheries Research Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create multi-agency research group to develop hypotheses and research agenda to address yellow perch issues in Green Bay. • Develop an assessment plan to evaluate the success of management actions taken to benefit Green Bay yellow perch. 	

Proposed Cooperative Agreement between USFWS and WDNR

Background. Mark Holey has proposed a cooperative agreement between the USFWS and the Department to pursue some of the Forum's recommendations.

Action. The LMFT discussed the proposal and supported it in principle. Bill Horns will work with Mark to develop the appropriate formal document for formal adoption.

LMFT charge

Background. In view of a) appointment of two fisheries supervisors (Toneys and Neibur) and b) some concerns about the LMFT decision-making process, we will review the LMFT charge. At a minimum, the LMFT charge should be updated to reflect the two new positions.

Action. The LMFT agreed to propose expanding the Policy Committee to include 5 individuals (instead of the present 3), with 2 appointed by the NER Water Leader, 2 appointed by the SER Water Leader, and 1 appointed by the Director of Fisheries. The team also agreed to propose amending the operating procedures to allow policy recommendations to be forwarded to the Guidance Team (Staggs, Verhoeven, Krohn) if supported by 10 or more Core Team members, or, failing that, if supported by 3 or more members of the expanded Policy Committee. These proposals, along with appropriate

changes to the Core Team membership list (add Neibur, add Kubisiak, fix some outdated job titles, other details), will be forwarded to the Guidance Team for consideration.

Perca

Background. The Perca has completed its spring work in SER and will be in Sturgeon Bay when we are there. NER has spelled out some program adjustments related to the operation and maintenance of the Perca.

Action. Discussion only - no action was taken.

Bloater chub harvest limits

Background. With lakewide chub biomass dropping and no significant recruitment, should we start pondering quota cuts? The Wisconsin harvest in 2001 was probably under 2% of the estimated lakewide biomass, even if we count unreported poundage stripped for eggs, discards, and the unsorted trawl catch. But, given that the estimated lakewide chub biomass dropped 56% between 1998 and 2001, is there merit in starting discussions internally and with commercial fishers, the Forum, etc. about when, if the trend continues, would be the right time to cutting quotas?

Action. No action was taken. The issue may be taken to the Forum for discussion later in the year. The following points were made during the discussion: 1) recruitment has been steady, although very low, 2) updated aging methods show that many the remaining chubs are much older than previously thought, some as much as 20 years old, 3) the present population is predominantly female, 4) we may be seeing a normal cycling in chub abundance, 5) Wisconsin's accounts for most of the commercial harvest in the lake, making most of the lake a virtual chub refuge, 6) there is no evidence for separate chub populations within the lake, 7) we have not seen compensatory growth in the remaining chubs, 8) the commercial fishery is somewhat self-regulating, especially in the northern chub zone, 9) it might be appropriate to cut the harvest limit to roughly match the actual harvest, 10) we should watch for changes in the seasonal fishing patterns of chub fishers next year when the new winter depth limits take effect.

Great Lakes sturgeon workshops

Background. The USFWS, in the person of Rob Elliot and with financial support from the Great Lakes Fisheries Trust, is organizing a series of "lake sturgeon coordination workshops". Ron Bruch is the primary Department representative on a steering committee that is planning the workshops, with Tom Meronek in the loop.

Action. Discussion only - no action was taken.

Membership of Lake Michigan Fisheries Forum

Background. The terms of four members of the LMFF will expire later this year. Under the present Forum charter members appointed by the Department may be re-appointed. The four are Larry Wirth, Lee Kernan (already resigned), Bill Willis, and Lee Haasch.

Action. The team agreed to a short list of candidates to recommend for the Kernan position. Regarding the three others, the team felt that because the initial terms for these individuals were only two years, it would be best to renew their appointments for additional three year terms. The team felt that in the future all new appointments should

be for three years, not four, and agreed to recommend the appropriate amendments to the Forum's charter.

Replacement for Mel Both as sport fishing advisor to GLFC

Background. Mel Both, the Governor's appointee as Lake Michigan sport fishing advisor from Wisconsin to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, recently passed away. It is appropriate for the LMFT to recommend a replacement.

Action. The team suggested asking Brian Belonger if he would be interested.

Brook trout stocking

Background. Presently the production plan for brook trout includes 67,700 large Nipigon fingerlings (for fall 2002) and 16,410 Nipigon yearlings (for spring 2003). All of these fish will be produced at the Brule River hatchery. It is possible to carry the fingerlings over and stock them as yearlings (with some loss in numbers). Production of 50,000+ yearlings for 2004 is within the capacity of the production system. This level of sustained brook trout stocking, in combination with the stocking of 120,000 nearshore rainbows and the full compliment of other species, might be considered to exceed the overall stocking level agreed to with the other agencies.

Action. The team agreed to request 50,000 Nipigon yearlings (25K in each region) for stocking in each of the next two years (2003 and 2004).

Smallmouth bass regulations

Background. Mike Neal and Tom Hansen have raised concerns about excessive harvest of smallmouth bass in Rowleys Bay. Concern about predation by gobies on unguarded bass eggs has led others to suggest limiting fishing when bass are guarding nests.

Action. No action was taken. Tim Kroef presented a short video showing the invasion of a smallmouth bass nest by gobies when the guarding parent was removed by angling, but also shared the observation that SMB nests were well populated by young bass in a heavily fished area. The team and Mike Neal discussed their concerns and those of the public regarding excessive harvest of bass, especially in Rowleys Bay. Possible rule changes to address the concerns were also discussed.

Possible allowance for counting burbot harvest against minimum catch requirement

Background. Ken Koyen has asked the Department to consider allowing reported harvests of burbot to be counted against the minimum catch requirement, so we should discuss the issue. Pete Flaherty offers these thoughts: "We'd need to set harvest limits per zone, then we'd have to figure out how to allocate the harvest among the licensees (racehorse or individual quota per some formula based on historic catch). Several rules would have to be amended to give Burbot the same status as wf, chubs, perch, smelt and menominee. Burbot are probably high enough in value to justify full regulation, but is there any management need? It would be a significant workload item for the department."

Action. No action was taken. It was suggested that at a later date an "under utilized species" rule package might be developed to facilitate the commercial harvest of both burbot and white perch.

Steelhead

Background. John Kubisiak had suggested three topics for discussion: 1) salmon stocking in the Root River, 2) his preliminary analysis of Lake Michigan steelhead exploitation by MI and WI anglers, and 3) definition of the role of Team Nearshore.

Action. John presented some new information for discussion. No action was taken.

Feral brood stock research/assessment planning

Background. At our last meeting we asked Andy Fayram to head-up the development of a research strategy to systematically study how to improve returns of steelhead, coho, and brown trout to brood rivers. Since then, Andy has explored the available data sources and he and I have discussed approaches to this issue. Steve Surendonk and Sue Marcquenski have shared thoughts via e-mail.

Action. The team agreed to the following: 1) Andy will prepare a draft “report card” format for pulling together the most pertinent annual data pertaining to the problem. The report card would include some information already summarized in annual weir reports and creel surveys, along with production information (e.g., size, date, stream flow at the time of stocking). 2) Someone (John Kubisiak?) will pull together data on the stocking dates and size-at-stocking of steelhead in recent years. 3) Andy will outline possible methods for estimating the out-migration of fish stocked in streams.

Lake Michigan Technical Committee meeting report

Background. The LMTC met in Milwaukee two days before our meeting.

Action. Discussion only - no action taken.